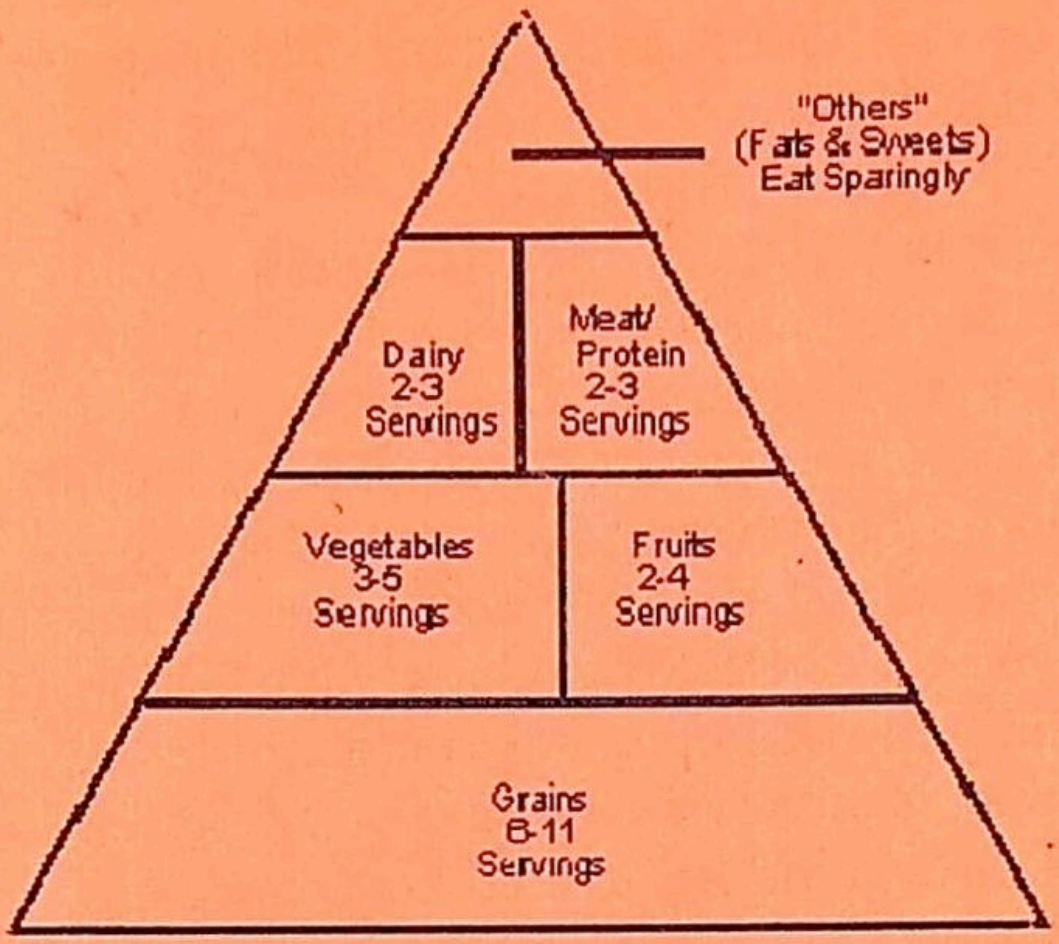
Teaching Nutrition



A small zine about healthy eating in public school.

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This zine was developed as a companion to a project for a class called EDU-105, Teaching as a Profession. I did a research project on how healthy eating and proper nutrition has a positive effect on the performance of kids in the classroom. I created this zine so my classmates would have something to take away from my project and hopefully incorporate what I found into their future lesson plans. I think the info I have here will be helpful not just to teachers but to parents and other caregivers as well. Promoting healthy eating to kids and incorporating nutrition in to learning is a service to students; it gives them an education for life and helps them learn at their greatest potential.

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The following are summaries of articles I read about proper eating and education.

The National School Lunch Program Background and Development

Did you know that the National School Lunch Program was started in the late 1960s in response to the malnutrition problem in large cities? That fact seems ironic today, given the generally unhealthy content of school lunches and the growing obesity epidemic. The program mandated that "The nutritive content of the meal… must meet at least a third of the child's nutritional requirements for the day, containing all of the elements essential to a balanced meal," and it was stated that "Properly coordinated with classroom work, the lunchroom can be a laboratory for actual experience in the principles of nutrition, sanitation, safety, personal hygiene, food service management, courtesies and social graces, budgeting, accounting, food storage and handling, food preservation, delivery systems, and many other subjects of importance to society."

School lunches must meet USDA Dietary Guidelines, which recommend that no more than 30% of calories come from fat, and less than 10% from saturated fat. Regulations also establish a standard for school lunches to provide 1/3 of the Recommended Dietary Allowances of protein, Vitamin A, Vitamin C, iron, calcium, and calories.

The USDA says school lunches must contain 2 oz. of meat protein, 1 serving of carbohydrates, 2 fruits/vegetables and 1 carton of milk. Unfortunately, the protein is often in the form of pepperoni pizza, cheeseburgers, or fried chicken nuggets. French fries count as a vegetable, and the fruit is often in a self-serve bowl that gets overlooked. The milk is artificially flavored and sweetened chocolate milk.

Don't forget that almost all schools offer a la carte items such as ice cream, chips, and cookies, and have snack and soda vending machines.

Wisconsin Briefs – Childhood Obesity

In 2000, 65% of the population was overweight, and 15% of children of children ages 6-11 were overweight. Wisconsin had especially high rates of childhood and adult obesity, as well as health problems related to overweight such as Type II diabetes. In an attempt to buck this trend, the state implemented a program in the town of Appleton to provide healthy breakfasts and lunches.

All soda and snack machines were taken out and no outside food was allowed in. The school menu was made over to be healthy and organic and exercise was promoted. The result of this experiment was that despite initial resistance, students accepted and enjoyed the new school food policy and learned a lot about nutrition and proper eating.

Many problems at Appleton High School were virtually eliminated after the implementation of the Health Lunches program. No drop-outs, less truancy, fewer outbursts, improved focus, and better learning are some of the positive effects of good nutrition on the students in the school.

Healthy Foods for Learning - How A Healthy Diet Helps At School

Healthy foods such as whole grains, fruits, vegetables, and high-protein items will help students make the most out of their school day by providing them with the fuel they need to learn and grow at school.

I asked five different teachers questions about their opinions on the lunches in their schools. The results:

Do you know what your students eat for lunch?
We only know what is printed on the menu- students might not it all of it or might eat a la carte items. Some bring their lunches. Many (secondary students) eat only a la carte items or nothing at all.

Do you think school lunches are healthy?
Teacher A:"I wouldn't eat them!"
Teacher C: "The lunches follow government standards, so even thought hey may not seem like the healthiest or most appetizing things, they are of nutritional value."
Teacher D: "Not as long as we allow French fries and ketchup to be considered vegetables! There's fresh fruit in the cafeteria, but I doubt kids are interested in it"

Do you notice a difference in student behavior after lunch?
Students often come to class late after lunch which takes away from class time. Many bring in candy/snacks/drinks, which are not allowed. Students are more restless and distracted after lunch.

Should teachers/schools include nutrition in the curriculum? If your school does, do the lunches there reflect the teaching?

Health/science classes teach about the food pyramid, vitamins, balanced diets, etc. Lunches reflect government regulated school lunch standards… they contain a protein source, fruit, vegetable, milk, etc.

Teacher B: "The foundation ought to be taught at home, but then again many parents don't know what a proper diet is. Teachers are role models for students, so we should demonstrate what proper eating is."

Teacher C: "All the fad diets are in the news and, as is the obesity epidemic…there are so many junk food ads on T.V. Students get mixed messages. I think we should help them learn how the body works, what it needs, what we should and should not eat.

How can nutrition/healthy eating be incorporated in to the curriculum?

Ideas can be incorporated in to science, gym/health, home economics, and math: study of the food pyramid, validity of popular diets, vitamins and minerals, bodily nutritional needs, structure of fat and calorie, caloric needs and exercise, healthy recipes, reading nutritional content labels of food, identifying ingredients

Nutritional Guidelines for Children

-Eat foods low in saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol, salt (sodium), and added sugars.
-Keep total fat intake between 25 to 35 percent of calories.
-Choose a variety of foods to get enough carbohydrates, protein and other nutrients.
–Serve whole-grain breads and cereals. Look for "whole grain" as the first ingredient on the food.
-Serve a variety of fruits and vegetables daily, limiting juice intake. Each meal should contain at least 1 fruit or vegetable.
-Don't overfeed. Estimated calories needed by children range from 900/day for a 1-year-old to 1,800 for a 14–18-year-old girl and 2,200 for a 14–18-year-old boy.

Here are a few ideas as to how healthy eating can be introduced at school. These ideas resulted from various articles, my own head, and discussions with my classmates.

-Include the food pyramid, basic tenets of nutrition, and information on balanced diets in health and/or science classes.
-Introduce students to new foods. Healthy foods such as whole grains, lean meats, alternative protein sources, and fresh fruits and vegetables may be foreign and unappetizing to students. If they are introduced in a manner that is fun and appealing to students, they are more apt to want to try them.
-Giving students choices/involving them in the process of decision making about lunches will positively affect the chances that students will accept new foods.
-Give non-food-based rewards (or healthy food rewards), such as watching a movie, hearing a story, or extra free time.
-Keep eating new, healthy foods fun, and remember that you may receive some initial resistance. However, you will be surprised at how receptive kids are to eating delicious healthy foods and fresh fruits and vegetables.

-Students in math and/or home economic classes can learn to prepare healthy recipes.
-Encourage parents to send in healthy snacks for the class.
-Set an example for your students. Tell them about the healthy foods you eat and offer them samples. Bring in alternative healthy snacks for students. Encourage them to drink water, especially after recess/playtime.

-A school/communal garden where vegetables are grown provides many learning opportunities, and students will be more likely to want to try vegetables if they had a part in the cultivation of them.

Recipes

A few simple, healthy, kid-friendly recipes.

Ants on a Log

Spread peanut butter on celery stalks, and dot with raisin "ants."

Trail Mix

Everyone loves trail mix! T can be made easily and economically by combining any number of ingredients: assorted raw nuts, granola, dried fruits, chocolate chips, crumbled cookies, oats, small crackers, etc.

Cookies

Oatmeal cookies a great choice! Many cookie recipes can be made healthier by using less sugar, using whole wheat flour, adding nuts or dried fruits, and using margarine instead of butter.

Fruit Salad

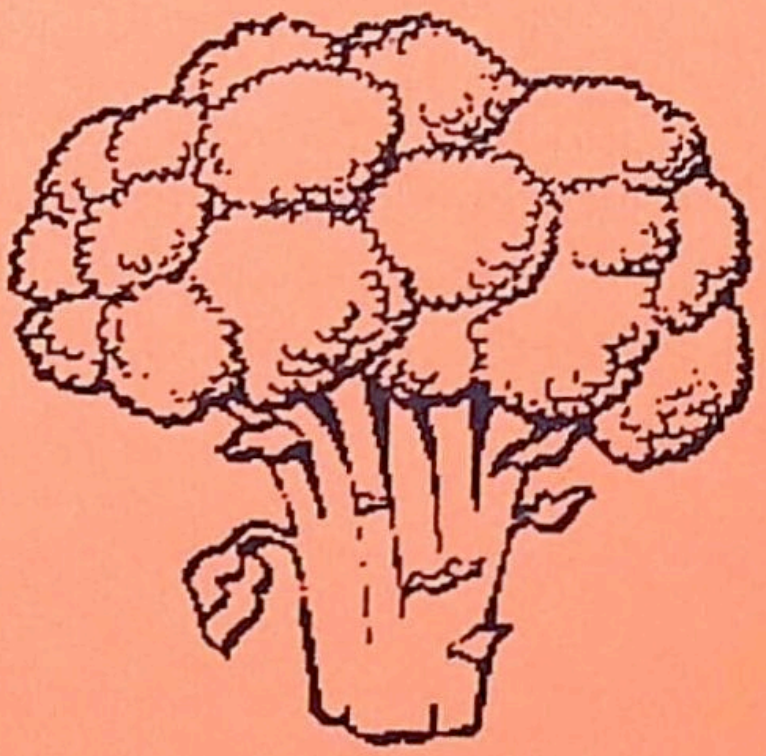
A jumble of assorted fruits, perhaps served with a light, sweet dressing or dip. Berries, grapes, apple slices, banana, cherries, etc. apples and bananas can be dipped in lemon juice to prevent browning. Fruits such as watermelon and other melons can be made in to balls with a melon baler, or sliced and then cut into shapes with cookie cutters.

Nachos

Served baked tortilla chips with salsa, bean dip (check ingredients- some may contain lard) and homemade guacamole (prepared brands may contain oils or sour cream).

Vegetable Crudités

Assorted chopped vegetables served with low-fat dips, salad dressing, or salsa. Vegetables kids like include celery, carrots, bell peppers (in many different colors!), broccoli, cauliflower, cucumbers, zucchini, peas in the pod, and string beans.



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